

"THE LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS"
INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE ROBERT A. TILLMAN

BY - MICHAEL FREEMAN
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INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE ROBERT TILLMAN

SEPTEMBER 8, 1987

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PLACE 3125 Cowden
DATE 9/8/87

Robert W. Willard
(INTERVIEWEE)

Mike Freeman
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



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This is a Memphis State University Oral History Research Office project: "The Life of Clarence Saunders". The interview is with Judge Robert Tillman. The date is September 8, 1987. The interview is at his home, 3175 Cowden. My name is Mike Freeman.

[The interview, except for the introduction was recorded at "long-play" tape speed. A clicking noise was heard throughout the interview.]

Judge Tillman: What I understand of Clarence Saunders' gift or contribution to society, as I call it...You have to turn back the pages of time and look at Memphis as it was, in his day. Population in Memphis in the 1920's was approximately 140,000. The community was made up of migrants from rural areas of West Tennessee, North Mississippi and Eastern Arkansas. We had some communities of Irish, Jewish, at that time. Of course life was much slower then, we lived at a much slower pace in those days.

Clarence Saunders made his fame revolutionizing retail merchandising. That was his forte. He was of stocky build with prematurely gray hair, a distinguished looking person. But he was not the talkative person, the out-going kind.

I don't know much about his background, or where he came from. But all of the sudden...You had a store called Piggly Wiggly opened on Jefferson between Front and Main on the southside.

In those days prior to the coming of Piggly Wiggly...if you look at "Gunsmoke" and whatever they called that place out West [Dodge city?], you can see how shopping was done. Usually, a housewife would go into a store. If a clerk was available, she would have a list...And this clerk...if you wanted sugar, salt, meal or whatever...he would go to the shelf, find it and bring it to the counter. When the list was exhausted he would laboriously add it up, maybe on the back of a paper sack or maybe some order blanks depending on the store and clientele. Then he would usually ask if it was to be charged or cash. Most grocery stores carried charge accounts for customers in their communities.

In those days Memphis was known as a one-street town. It would be amazing to know how many people went to Main Street to buy their groceries then. They had groceries [stores] on the east side of Main Street from Jefferson to Washington and below that [to the North] you had kosher delicatessens, markets and groceries run by Orthodox Jews to serve the people of their community, called Pinch.

And all of the sudden, you have Piggly Wiggly...the first time, I guess, in the history of the nation that people, instead of relying

on clerks to wait on them...you had self-service. It came upon us sort of like "gangbusters", you might call it. Because it received universal acceptance. Instead of the clerk, of course, you had the four wheeled cart, and it caught on...It had an amazing effect on the community and on retailing of all types of merchandise...a nationwide effect.

Judge Tillman: Well, the money rolled in. In no time at all Clarence Saunders, in terms of liquid assets, was easily the richest man in Shelby County. Now this is some folklore I am going to give now. Having amassed all this wealth it seemed fit and proper that he would join the Memphis Country Club. The Memphis Country Club was at the time composed of old members of the southern aristocracy....

Mr Freeman: cotton planters....

Judge Tillman: wealthy people, plantation owners, big businessmen, cotton people. It seemed just as important that the bloodlines as the finances, wealth. So, they rejected him. As I understand the story he became furious. "Well", he said, "I'll build an establishment that will make this joint [the country club] look like a peanut stand". Or words to that effect. He went right across the street along the northern boundry of the Memphis Country Club, which is Central Avenue and bought property. I don't know how many blocks...that began on the west end where the railroad ran east [his directions were unclear: Saunders' had purchased land between approximately the Louisville & Nashville Railroad on the west to Greer Avenue on the east; Central Avenue to the south and Poplar Avenue to the north.] Then he started building the Pink Palace...A lot of people would refer to him as a genius. Others would refer to him as eccentric to a fault. A very unusual type of person...And he started building the Pink Palace. Much of the material was imported from overseas. As I understand the story, although he had the finest of architects, he drew the plans. If he didn't like the appearance of something that was developing, he would say; "Tear it down, change it all!" He made it "sui Clarence Saunders".

He was married, of course, at that time. He had two children [three children in fact], two sons, Lee and Clay [and a daughter Amy Clare]. People would wonder why in the world would he build something like that for just four [five] people. Of course it seemed to be a combination [of things] to him. He wanted a place so he could lavishly entertain, with outstanding ballrooms which were something out of this world for that time. The bedrooms, the baths...no one had ever heard of anything like that in this part of



the country. And he had an 18 hole golf course, riding paths, the lake...People would wonder what Clarence Saunders would be doing next.

Well, he made a fool bond daddy. According to the stories I knew of, he tried to corner the market of Piggly Wiggly stock...

Mr. Freeman: 1923.

Judge Tillman: He had it cornered, until the smart boys up there [the New York Stock Exchange] changed the rules on him. In other words he had said if the rules had remained the same he would have been multi- multi- multi-millionaire, he had them where they were short...and they couldn't deliver the stock they sold short and he bought. But they changed the rules on him, pooled assets, and finally broke him. He went bankrupt.

Well, that didn't stop Clarence Saunders. He started a new chain of stores called "Clarence Saunders", that was the name of the stores. If I recall correctly Kroger [Kroger Grocery Company] bought the bankrupt Piggly Wiggly stores, whatever the copyright name was and maybe some patents on some of the gadgets...

Mr. Freeman: Kroger bought Piggly Wiggly. [In 1928, four years after Saunders declared bankruptcy].

Judge Tillman: They [the Piggly Wiggly Corporation, in 1924] tried to prevent him from going back into the business under his own name of "Clarence Saunders", claiming the name was so interwoven with the Piggly wiggly Corporation that he infringed upon the rights they secured under the purchase of the patents and copyrights [Kroger had no part in this lawsuit against Mr. Saunders]. He won that lawsuit. He changed the store name to "Clarence Saunders Sole Owner of My Name". of course he was the underdog and the public was very outspoken in their support of him.

He made money. I can't give you the chronology of all this. I can the various things...

He lived...and they say he would take a pro [professional golfer] out on the golf course...that happened a lot in those days and happens now...and play, and bet so much per hole. they say one pro was playing it "smart". He was goofing off, he would let Saunders win a hole. Then Saunders stopped him and said: "Listen! You are not making a chump out of me! You are playing me for a sucker. I am paying you, and we are betting. You do your best! If I can win a hole, all right. But if i can't, I am paying you. so don't do that again!" That was the type of man he was.

He like boxing. Boxing was in the doldrums at that time. He



tried to bring it back with a couple of promotions. We had a man here in Memphis, Kid Dugan. Francis Doran was his real name.. Red Ericks (?) from Little Rock, they were the two top middleweights in this area. He staged two top bouts between them. It didn't go. So, he also loved football. He organized the football team, "Clarence Saunders Tigers". I can remember the names, Larry Bettencourt was an All-American from St. mary's out on the coast [California].

Mr. Freeman: I've heard of him.

Judge Tillman: He picked up a couple of young Memphis athletes who never went to college, great athletes. One was Erselle "Red" Cavette who was head of the Southeastern Conference football officicals and was later, before he retired a few years ago, head instructor of the officials in the Metro Conference.

Mr. Freeman: I've talked to him before.

Judge Tillman: I know that he would bring in stars from the various football teams around this area, from the Southeast Conference. They made a very respectable showing against any teams they played, and beat most of them...[They] played at Hodges Field, on what is now the Veterans hospital at Jefferson and Somerville. They had old wooden stands that would hold 400 people. I guess the top attendance was, to his extravaganzas, 1500. They [the fans] would walk along the sidelines. Memphis then wasn't so large, and there was the same group of sportsmen who followed one sport, usually followed all the others. The money he spent bringing these teams here, like the Red Grange, Bronko Nagurski...

Mr. Freeman: Chicago Bears.

Judge Tillman: Then there was Ernie Nevers of the St. Louis [Chicago] Cardinals. He also pitched for the St. Louis [baseball] Browns. they had tremendous teams. Saunders would bring them here, and probably have a \$500 or so gate, and there is no telling how many thousands it cost to bring them here. It was maybe good advertising. It kept his name, and himself, before the public.

Mr. Freeman: He lost money.

Judge Tillman: Oh yea. I know on one occassion, two occassions...Now this is folklore. But I was present on one occassion. Something happened and he was five minutes late getting to the



game. he told them to call it off and start the game over.

Mr. Freeman: I've heard that.

Judge Tillman: You've heard that. The other one was; the field was a vertible quagmire, all mud. See, the prep [high school] teams used it. they had torrential rains. The field was a mud pile. He ordered big tank loads of gasoline. He got out there [on the field] himself with rubber boots and all. They saturated the whole field with gasoline and set it afire to dry it off, and maybe make it playable. then he decided he was going to assemble a team to beat the Green Bay Packers [National Football League champions in 1929]. He brought in several...I remember a couple of names he brought in. Doug Wycoff, who was a former star at Georgia Tech, and played professional football. He brought in Ken Strong, who played for the New York Giants. He assembled a team, but people were laughing at him. For Johnny Youngblood was the quarterback for the packers, the world champion football team. They [the Packers] came in here in the latter part of November. There was an unusual occurance, an Indian summer day. It was terrifically hot. It seemed to get to the Packer team, who played in Green Bay. The Clarence Saunders Tigers beat the world champion Packers. To him nothing was impossible.

I saw him do this. I was an employee of The Commercial Appeal, a linotype operator. I was a linotype operator when I went to law school. He would come in...I think Friday morning was the day of the food advertisements [in the newspapers]. Different chain stores advertised. I think this was during the Clarence Saunders sole owner of My Name Stores, during that era [1924-1933]. he would come in at the last minute on thursday, and bring a lot of copy in and want to buy a couple of pages of ads. We were in the Depression then and no newspaper would turn down two full pages of advertisements. So they would put on some extra help, which plenty was available. He would bring his copy in and read his own proof. He was the only one who I have ever seen to do something like this. After he read his proof and everything was ready, he would go around, find the compositors, and hand them a ten dollar bill, which was a couple of bucks more than the wage scale then. He was that type of a person.

That's the story of Clarence Saunders as I knew him. He was a very unususal person. He had one other chapter in his life. He came forward with what they called the Keedoozle. It opened right on the viaduct here on Poplar [Poplar and Union Extended]. Who was the cartoonist who had all those funny looking contraptions?

Mr. Freeman: Rube Goldberg?



Judge Tillman: Rube Goldberg. Anyway this Keedoozle was something he surmized was a modern way of merchandising. The customer would walk down the aisle with a pistol-like gadget. If she wanted a can of this or that she would stick the pistol [in a slot next to a display window] and pull the trigger in there...a can would fall onto a [conveyor] belt and...You didn't have the baskets there. Trouble with that he was never able to keep the [customers'] orders seperate. You'de get upset with that.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, they had a lot of trouble making it work.

Judge Tillman: If that was successful, there was no telling what the man's wealth might have wound up to be. He was....

[Pause, while he searches for a clipping].

Judge Tillman: Oh, this was an amusing chapter in his life, to me. A candidate for governor of Tennessee, I can't recall his name, it looked like he was getting a bad rap from professional politicians. So he came out with page advertisements in support of the candidate. I don't recall whether the man won or lost. Thing is that was so comical about it was that Saunders forgot to register to vote. [laughter]

Mr. Freeman: I remember reading about it now. He [Saunders] was an opponent of E. H. Crump.

Judge Tillman: Yes.

Mr. Freeman: Crump and Saunders feuded for years.

Judge Tillman: Oh yea, I've given many hours of interviews on that subject. I was three times a member of the legislature, a general circuit judge, one of the first...the [Crump] organization abolished my court by legislative action. [laughter]. Of course, I knew quite a bit about the Crump regime.

But Clarence Saunders faded out of the picture. I don't recall what became of the man. I knew a little of the inside, and some of the folklore, but truthfully... Mrs. Saunders was a very private person. her being connected publicly with him. I doubt if many knew her name. They eventually were divorced. He and the second Mrs. Saunders had one child. As I recall, his name was supposed to be Tunkie Saunders, who later became one of the "jetsets" [Tunkie Saunders was actually a stepson of Clarence Saunders]. The jetsets were having a big, drunken party and I think they were swapping



women folk. He got mad at the son of the big banker here in town, Mr. Alexander, and shot the young man. He came very nearly to neutering him. anyway it created a sort of a stir that they tried to keep covered up. He was convicted, but pardoned by the then governor of Tennessee. I don't vouch for the validity of the relationship, because I am not certain...

I do now his son, Lee was a very solid citizen. But his son Clay [Clarence Saunders, Jr.] was wilder than a marsh hare. This was a story that was broadcast all over Memphis, but was hushed up. He and some of the young, wealthy, members of Memphis society...the affluent people who ran around together...The parents of one of the boys had gone on a trip, so he throws a big party at the family home, one of the big mansions in town. There were lots of men and women (or boys and girls) there. One of the boys passed out. I forgot his name...Falls Building...he was a member of the family that built the Falls Building. Anyway, they had him stripped of his clothes, and were taking rubbing alcohol to bring him around. and this goofy Saunders boy said, "Stand back! I'll bring him around." He lit a match and threw it over, caught the Falls boy around the privates. It [the match] flamed up and I think neutered the boy. The old man [Clarence Saunders] put him [Clay] on a train and sent him away from here, to Cuba, I think.

Mr. Freeman: That was Clay?

Judge Tillman: That was Clay. I think later, i can't vouch for this, but Clay died in a mental institution.

Mr. Freeman: I've heard that story.

Judge Tillman: I don't know what happened to Clarence Saunders, who sort of faded out...and I don't know when he died.

Mr. Freeman: 1953.

Judge Tillman: 1953, what was he doing then?

Mr. Freeman: He was supposed to be working on a new store, but it never opened.

Judge Tillman: Like I say, he was a distinguished looking man. Looking from a woman's eyes you would probably say he was handsome. And he certainly revolutionized the whole concept of retail merchandising.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, he did.



Judge Tillman: He meant a lot for the city of Memphis, and for the whole country when you think about it. Look at the picture of life as it was going then, and the expenses involved of merchandising and retail...and then, figure the idea of self-service into it, along with mass-purchasing and mass-advertising. One Piggly Wiggly ad, was maybe a couple of pages, but it was good for all the Piggly Wiggly stores, which made advertising very cheap by comparison. I remember Clarence Saunders as a merchandiser, people used to wonder how he did it. Perhaps, it was just loss leaders [selling items below cost to attract shoppers into the store], as they were called then. I remember during the Depression he sold pork shoulders for a nickle a pound. [laughter].

Any questions you have now?

Mr. Freeman: Did you know him?

Judge Tillman: I talked to him. he came up to The Commercial Appeal, and I would talk to him.

Mr. Freeman: With his ads?

Judge Tillman: With his ads. Oh, by the way. This is a little angle I forgot to tell you. He was so successful in his advertising that the other stores filed a complaint with the newspapers. That somebody on the newspaper staff was tipping Clarence off on their prices. He would come in at the last minute [laughter] and buy those ads and under-cut them [his competitors]. The papers were forced to adopt a rule that all their ads and their prices had to be turned in at a certain time, say Wednesday, which put them all on an even plane.

He was a very pleasant person to talk to. He was not at all arrogant, as I knew him. He was "good old Joe". he didn't put on any airs of affluency. He was of very few of his kind. He was like an average person with a streak of genius, that he was trying something all the time. I don't where he came from before he opened Piggly Wiggly, some say he worked in and owned a little store. he certainly was familiar with the operations of the store. That he worked in one, I don't know.

Mr. Freeman: He used to be a salesman, and called on grocery stores. so he knew their operations. Did you know anybody that worked with him, financed him or loaned him money?

Judge Tillman: There were a couple of families, that...I was trying to recall their names...One of them had a baseball team and as I



understand it they represented him in some of the stores (?). I don't know, maybe I am wrong about this. I am trying to recapture the names of a couple of families who were really loyal to him. They invested very heavily in the first stores and of course made them a lot of money. Of course they lost it when the [Piggly Wiggly] stock went down. I understand that in their venture, when he came back with the Clarence Saunders Stores, the same couple of families were very loyal to him. They financed him on his later ventures.

Mr. Freeman: Would Stratton be one of those names?

Judge Tillman: Well...

Mr. Freeman: Leslie Stratton?

Judge Tillman: That doesn't ring a bell with me. Of course I knew the Strattons, Leslie Stratton was in the wholesale hardware business. Stratton-Warren Hardware.

Mr. Freeman: I read that he helped finance...

Judge Tillman: He could have. But that was not the two names I recalled. They were very loyal to him. And it wasn't hard to be loyal to him. You figured even though he made mistakes, a man with that kind of mind was not to be kept down on the lower level. He was bound to come up with something. If he had stuck with the Clarence Saunders Sole Owner of My Name stores, he...but the man had an insatiable appetite to grow. You know, it was a driving force within him.

Mr. Freeman: Ambitious.

Judge Tillman: Ambitious, very ambitious. Now someone...I don't want to throw bricks at him, it might be wrong for me to say this. I was told that his divorce and last marriage was one of those forced things, forced deals.

Mr. Freeman: Forced?

Judge Tillman: That he carried his second wife across state lines and that the state could have vigorously enforced...He met this person through the purposes of an enormously large life insurance policy. She paid court time and got him entangled...which caused a divorce and his second marriage. Now I don't want to be the author of this story but that was the story going around then.



Mr. Freeman: I won't use your name. That was a touchy subject among a lot of people. They didn't want to discuss it.

Judge Tillman: Well, that part of the story is heresay. Anything that happened to Clarence Saunders seemed to get around because his name was a household byword anywhere. Anything that Clarence Saunders touched seemed to get publicity, pro or con.

Mr. Freeman: Good or bad. Now you say he was not real talkative? Chatty or talkative. Yet he was a salesman at one time. Was he real direct?

Judge Tillman: Well, there are different kinds of salesmen. I've known some salespeople that were successful because they had the gift of gab and they would oversell. High pressure salesmen they were called. Yet some called on a customer and said; "I've got a good product, our prices are real competitive, and our service is the best. We have no gimmicks." And they would make their sale.

You take a certain kind of salesman in a particular industry, say someone who sold janitor supplies who always got to the purchasing agent and putting him under high pressure and giving him an award, maybe a watch or a kickback of some kind for him. First thing you know he was caught in a web, and the next thing you know he makes a crazy order that is very profitable to the...

Mr. Freeman: Janitor's supplier?

Judge Tillman: supplier people. I know once just to illustrate that point. I was a young lawyer, and one of those lawyers brought some accounts to my associate. One of these accounts was a wholesale house in Clarksdale, Mississippi. It was for a very substantial amount of floor sweep. We went down to Clarksdale, Mississippi and we talked to some lawyers. Of course we had to find some lawyers who were not closely associated with that wholesale firm. We finally got a lawyer and asked him if it would be embarrassing to bring suit against the firm. As far as technicalities are concerned the company was on high ground, but when it came to honesty and integrity and right kind of dealing, I wouldn't have anything to do with them. Anyway, this lawyer took it and won some money. And it cost the purchasing agent his job. He [the lawyer] told me, I had met him after that, I really hated to enforce that contract. He said that the salesman had sold the wholesale company more floorsweep than it could sell in fifteen years. [laughter] He [the salesman] had made some deals.



Mr. Freeman: Oh no.

Judge Tillman: Now it got to be, this company, operated out of the same manufacturing place that operated four or five companies. And if that company in Clarksdale had...of course he [the salesman] struck the Clarksdale company off his list. But the same manufacturer, with a different salesman, would call upon them next week, and they wouldn't know the difference.

Then I knew one man who was in that business. The first thing he does when he talks to the purchasing agent...he wasn't one of those flattering, gushy people. He just said; "We've got some fine products that could compete with anybody, no gimmicks...we can compete on prices...I'll assure you good service." He made a very attractive yearly income. He was not a very loquacious person. If he had to do that, he would have starved to death. I've known different kinds of salesmen.

Mr. Freeman: Saunders was not a real pushy type?

Judge Tillman: That's right. Well, you know, intelligent people appreciate that. They don't like to be pushed around, out-smarted. And I think there has been a change away from what you were talking about. Like the used car salesman's reputation today; they don't like that kind of stuff and they try to live down the reputation earned through the years.

That's it.

Mr. Freeman: You were going to show me something a minute ago, and I interrupted you.

Judge Tillman: I was going to show you some notes I wrote down, of his life as I knew it. I don't want you to feel that I was a personal, intimate friend. I knew him, but whether he remembered my name or not...Everybody knew Clarence Saunders. I can't say if he was cordial every time I saw him on the street. I don't want to make any claims. That's why I suggested you talk to some of the football players, because I believe Red [Cavette] was closer to him on a personal basis. I wasn't. He [Red Cavette] lives right around the corner at 258 South Greer.

That's Clarence Saunders as I knew him. I think he was a fine person. People have their different ideas about him, but I think he did a lot for the city of Memphis. That Pink Palace...



SIDE TWO

Mr. Freeman: His property. He had a big chunk of land.

Judge Tillman: His land, like I said, from Central to Poplar and I don't know how far east. I'm sure it was [east] to Greer. I don't know whether that part of Greer was open or not, because a lot of this land in the 1920's was vacant, rural land.

I might add he and his wife in those days....

There was not electrical refrigeration, so in those days we had ice boxes. But where did we get ice? Well, a person on horse drawn vehicle delivered it. The ice man would come with ice in blocks of 300 pounds or more. They became artists with saws and picks, and cut the ice into blocks of 12 1/2 pounds, 25 pounds and 50 pounds. The size of ice people bought depended on the size of their ice box and the size of their pocketbook. For dairy products, the milkman on a horse drawn vehicle...at the time we were in a transition between the horse drawn carriage and the automobile caused by [Henry] Ford and his Flivver [the Model-T Ford]. And then they had little van-like equipment that delivered milk in place of the horse drawn vehicle. The last thing a housewife did at night was put the milk bottles out. Milk was delivered to the home in bottles. And also butter, cream, buttermilk [was delivered]. If you wanted to change all this, or add a little more, you would write a little note and stick that in the neck of one of the bottles. Early the next morning, the first thing she did was bring the dairy products in.

Vegetables then were hawked. Around Memphis there were truck gardeners of Italian descent who came here as immigrants or sons and daughters of immigrants. land was scarce. Here they could make something grow practically every day of the year. They utilized every bit of the land they had. they became very successful truck farmers. To the south were the Berretta (sic) family. And the Bracchia (sic) family out in Frayser, there were others out east. They had markets for them [the truck farmers], one at Washington, and one at Beale Street. There was one in North Memphis near here. They would then bring their vegetables to the markets, or buy space in the market and sell them to people who had conveyances like a horse and wagon. They might be black or some of them might be Italian and hawk vegetables door to door. The housewife went to the curb...You'de hear the vegetable man or the ice man down the street and the housewife would go to the curb and look over the vegetables. Either the housewife, maid or cook depending on the affluency of the family. But they bought their vegetables at home.

Even coal was hawked door to door in bushel baskets. In the early 20's most of the homes were heated by pot-bellied stoves



buring coal or wood. The first thing a man did in the morning, of course if he was affluent he got a servant, was to get the hot water boiling; steam heat was poplar. he had to get the hot water going, he had kindling and he built a fire.

Judge Tillman: You had in those days meat markets, bakeries, and grocery stores. It was only after the popluarity of the department stores and retailing came along that they put thee items into a store [supermarkets]. Bry's Department Store was located on...It was a department store that catered to those on the low end of the totem pole as opposed to Lowensteins, or Goldsmiths; and Gerbers, which catered to the more affluent people. Gerbers was literally the top, only real affluent people catered this store. Bry's had their department store on the northwest corner of Main and Jefferson. On the rear end they had a grocery store, meat market and fish market. They had several departments, like hardware. That was more like the general merchandise business you see in rural communities.

You had at that time people who migrated from rural areas who didn't know what white bread was. They knew what it was, they called it "loaf bread". They bought it occassionally, but the housewife of the low income or working class baked biscuits, or corn bread; what they called, "flat bread" from scratch at every meal. Then you had some bakeries, like Lilly's on North Second Street or Winklerman's On North Main. And down a little further (on North Main) you had some of the immigrants, they had one bakery that catered to Italians. They made knot bread that they eat with spaghetti. They had bread in long sticks. You had Snider's on Vance, Snider's on High Street, Bee's (sic) Bakery on North Main, Burkle's on Madison oand Cooper. They were mostly German families. Bakery was an art and trade for those people. Later you had McLarens' over on Highland, which is still there and very successful. That is out of the ordinary today, most bakeries went out of existence.

That's the change that has taken place today. You go down North main in the early 20's, and you probably had ten shoe stores, and that's all they sold. Like florsheim's, and...I used to know so many other names. there you had Phil A Halle's. That was a men's or gents haberdashery. That was in the Exchange Building at Second and Madison. and Oak Hall on Main between Jefferson and West Court. Beasely (sic) Brothers was down on South Main. You had stores that sold very cheap products that catered to the real low end of the totem pole, the "credit houses" they were called. All up and down Main Street. The department stores, the big retailers and the [shopping] malls just forced out all those little retail operations. Easy to understand why...people will open a



business where people [shoppers] want to come. I think you still have some Florsheim Shoe [stores] in the malls.

Judge Tillman: Life in Memphis, all over the United States, has changed in 60,65 years. I have been living in Memphis 65 years.

Mr. Freeman: Changed quite a bit. Did you ever hear of, or know where Clarence got the idea for Piggly Wiggly?

Judge Tillman: I don't think he ever revealed that. I don't know he may have...seemed that he was credited with the idea coming to him. I mean, that's what made it so remarkable. I never heard anything that pointed him to that, except maybe it was a product of his own mind. "Why would these people line up and wait for a clerk?", maybe that's something like what he said. Have you ever heard anything?

Mr. Freeman: There are some stories that I can't really prove; that self-service existed in other parts of the country, and that Clarence Saunders knew about that. It's hard to prove though.

Judge Tillman: Well, let me ask you this. If that were true, why didn't they copyright or patent the idea? he must have improved on it, you know. I understand why someone had to develop those ideas, but it was not all encompassing yet...They never thought to give it [self-service] the financing, the final push. Mass-advertising, mass-purchasing, the turnstiles, your cash registers, all came along about the same time. Most of your little stores operated out of a cash drawer, they didn't have a cash register, which were very primitive at the time. About that time Clarence Saunders opened they came along with the tape.

Mr. Freeman: Adding machine tape.

Judge Tillman: When the checkout clerk got all your items totaled, they could tear off, and give you part of the tape.

No, I never heard of a...I thought generally speaking Clarence Saunders had been given credit for inventing or coming forward with the idea of self-service in a retail store. I never heard or seen any evidence to the contrary.

Mr. Freeman: Well, there were a couple of stores, one in California and one in Montana. They were a one-store, small operation. Saunders was the first to...

Judge Tillman: Well, we had in Memphis grocery stores outside of Main Street which were family operations, little, very small. There



had started in Memphis a group or chain called Bowers. But bower's was the same situation with the clerks. It was a going venture that used advertising like Piggly Wiggly did. I think Kroger bought out Bowers [in 1928] and then Piggly Wiggly in bankruptcy. they phased out the Piggly Wiggly [name] and put emphasis on their own, Kroger's.

Mr. Freeman: Well, I'll probably never know whether he borrowed Piggly Wiggly or not. He did introduce self-service all over the country.

Judge Tillman: Like I say, as far as this section of the country is concerned, he is given credit for originating the whole idea. And he certainly made it work.

Mr. Freeman: He certainly did.

Judge Tillman: If he had not made that foolish mistake, there is no telling how much wealth he would have accumulated. Certainly in this area of the country nobody knew anything about self-service stores.

Mr. Freeman: He may have created it in his own mind, unaware that someone had done it before.

Judge Tillman: Could have been in an out of the way country place, the store owner was too lazy to wait on his customers. In some of those country stores, they had no turnstiles, but the owner would sit there and let people go around and get what they want. [laughter] I've seen that. That was more laziness than anything else.

Mr. Freeman: Really industrious. [laughter]

Judge Tillman: Like I say, about...I don't know whether any of this will help you or not.

Mr. Freeman: I think you have helped me quite a bit.

Judge Tillman: If I am not mistaken, the candidate for governor was "Honest" Henry Horton. I believe that was the candiate Saunders helped.

Mr. Freeman: Saunders helped "Honest" Henry?

Judge Tillman: "Honest" Henry Horton.

Mr. Freeman: He had earlier helped Austin Peay.

Judge Tillman: Yea, I remember Austin Peay has a...I thought the Crump organization sought to support him, then opposed him, and at the 1st minute realizing he was too strong, they changed. The Crump really began in state government in the election of 1930, when they elected Hill McAlister governor. And in 1936 the Crump organization elected Gordon Browning governor, in 1938 Prentice Cooper, in 1942 Prentice Cooper again. In 1944 and 46 Jim Nance McCord. In 1948 it was Browning again and Estes Kefauver for the Senate. After Browning came Clement. In those eras...see, the Crump organization supported Browning and then had a big break shortly after the election. But Crump nominated Cooper, McCord, Clement, Ellington. Any wish Crump wanted...

Mr. Freeman: was granted.

Judge Tillman: They were fearful of that terrific Shelby county vote. The beginning of the end of the Crump organization was 1948 when Browning and Kefauver turned the tide and defeated the opposition supported by the Crump organization.

Mr. Freeman: Now did Crump and Saunders really dislike one another?

Judge Tillman: I would think so. I think...I can only draw a conclusion. I think that Saunders couldn't stomach the idea of someone having the power that Crump had. although some people didn't mind having that power themselves. [laughter] You take...We get all wrapped making people heroes. You take this editor here, Meeman [the late Edward Meeman of the Memphis Press-Scimitar] who fought the Crump organization for years. He withstood all kinds of personal attacks and everything else. Yet... I was closely associated with Meeman. Meeman was very much like Crump, he just thought...He didn't object to the idea that someone could just name people to an office, he just thought he could do it better than Crump could. I have evidence that was true, although he was worshipped by the anti-Crump people here. Even after Kefauver was elected here, Browning...Well, the same thing happened. Ordinary people get steamed up and they go around and knock on doors and elected people. The next thing you know the same old elite crowd takes over. They don't go back to the people who elect the candidates. Candidates don't go back to the people who elected them and say, "What do you want down here?" They go back to the big wheels, and it is just perfectly natural. When



you say, "We are the government of the people", that is a lot of nonsense. People have the power every now and then to knock somebody off, but who moves in? the same type of people. When you had Browning and Kefauver elected, then you had Meerman and "True" Lucious Burch, although certainly Lucious Burch had no constituency. He was the lawyer for the Illinois Central Railroad. And the people don't look with favor on the railroads.

Mr. Freeman: He wasn't exactly a common man, wasn't he?

Judge Tillman: He was in a position to appoint United States District Attorneys, federal judges. You look at his record you will find how many from his [law] office went into public office.

[Voices in the background].

Judge Tillman: In other words, I read an article...I never thought I would live to see this, but Lucious Burch in a speech, talk or gathering said the trouble with the city today is the "establishment", as he called it, had moved in and taken over. [laughter] Of course, he was the establishment when Meerman was around. He and Meerman were the establishment when they took over.

Mr. Freeman: I'll be darned.

Judge Tillman: I understand a hundred dollars was a lot of money, you could get many football players for that. I understand Ken Strong...many were talking about what it took to get Ken Strong to come down to Memphis and play the Green Bay packers. I was told it was \$500 plus all expenses, travel. Of course Bettencourt was on a regular payroll of some kind. The other players were paid for what they demanded or what Saunders was willing to pay them. He paid them...Of course Ken Strong was a fine football player, but \$500 was a lot of money back in those days.

Mr. Freeman: That's hard to picture now.

Judge Tillman: He loved to make and spend money. He loved football, and the crowds couldn't have paid a small percentage of the costs.

Mr. Freeman: Did he bet on those football games?

Judge Tillman: If we had just a few like him in Memphis today. We'd have a buzzing city. We just don't have that.



Mr. Freeman: Did he bet on those games?

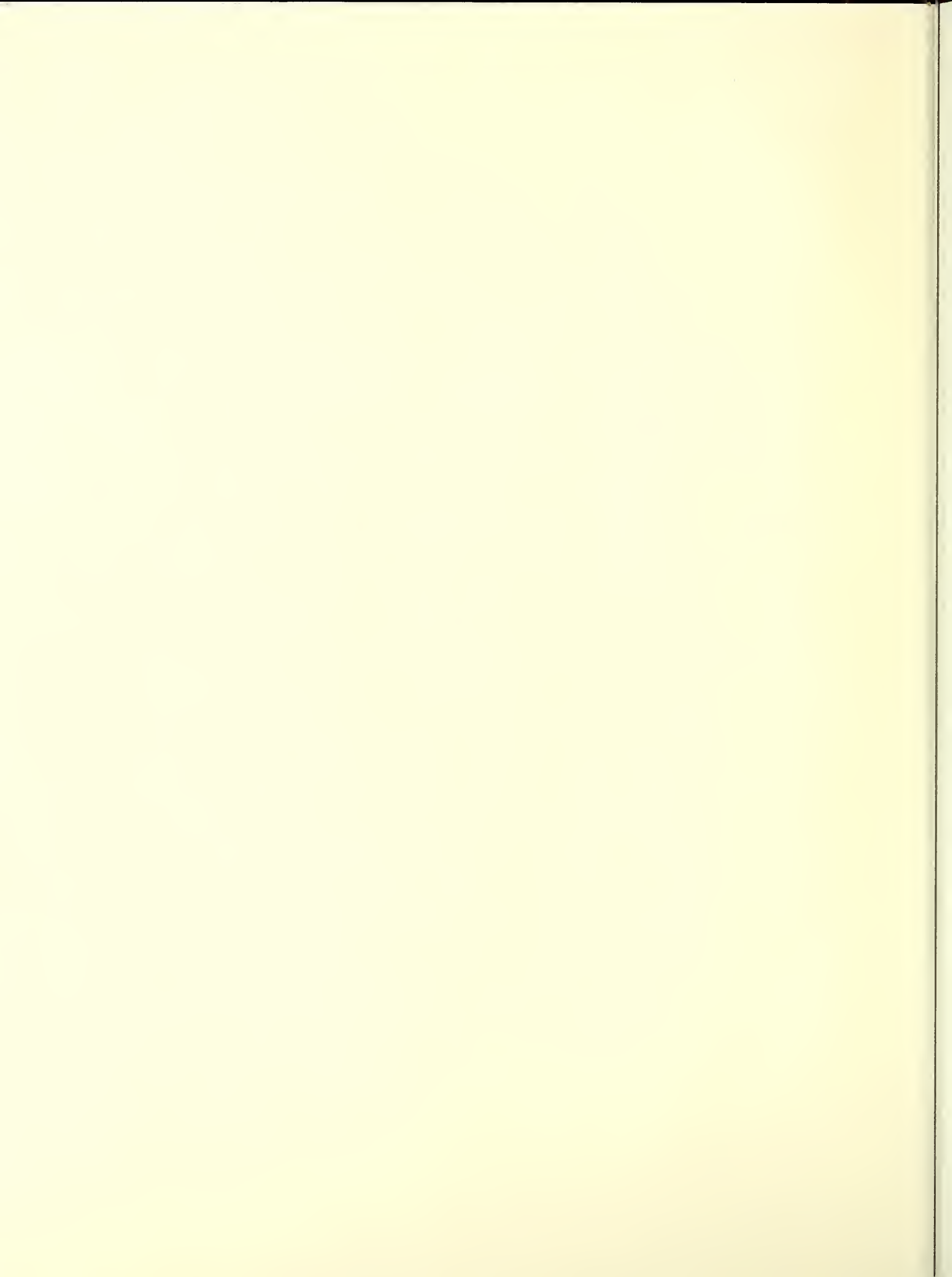
Judge Tillman: No, I don't think so. No one ever said any gambling was involved. Just a love to promote and adverse was involved. Clarence Saunders was promoting his Clarence Saunders tigers, the advertising feature may have made it worthwhile. He didn't mind spending it. Everybody thought he spent at least \$10,000, \$20,000 [for a game] and had a gate of, oh \$1500. [laughter]

Mr. Freeman: That didn't bother him at all.

Judge Tillman: That's Mr. Saunders as I knew him.









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